

How to Plan for Long-Term Care

Long-term care. The phrase itself is scary for many people. But going into long-term care can be the start of an enjoyable new chapter in life.

It's natural for seniors to want to stay in the homes they've created over the years. But over time, keeping up with daily routines and household maintenance can become a burden. On top of that, if they become less mobile and active, some seniors become socially isolated.

Long-term care can help lift that burden, and be a positive change for older adults.

How to Know When It's Time for Long-Term Care

Everyone is different and the decision to move is a personal one. Some people put it off as long as possible in order to maintain their independence. However, if there comes a point when staying at home progresses from being a burden to being unsafe, then it's time for a move.

Some people opt to move to a long-term care facility while they are still active, so that they can establish connections and become part of the community before they need more advanced care.

"Rarely do we hear our residents say that they moved here too soon. Just the opposite. We often hear people who dealt with day-to-day burdens say their lives have been much richer socially and easier to manage."

Lonnie Baker, CEO, Meadowlark

It boils down to two main factors:

- **Quality of Life:** As your loved ones age, you might notice changes in their daily habits. Perhaps the home looks a little messier or they have difficulty with meal planning and preparation. Ask them: Where do you want to spend your energy?

If they would rather focus on hobbies and friends instead of keeping up a household, then moving to long-term care could help them free up their time, so they can spend it on activities and people that matter to them.

Some people opt for in-home health care to extend their time at home, but there may come a time when home health is not a viable option.

- **Safety:** Certain changes in routine and abilities are to be expected. But when these changes impact the safety of your loved ones, it's time to move to long-term care. Are they able to maneuver comfortably around the home? Are they at risk for falls? Are they able to stay on top of their medications? Bottom line, ask yourself: Can they care for themselves safely without a caregiver in the home at all times?

With increased risk comes an increased sense of urgency, which can add stress. The sooner you can discuss the topic with them, the easier it will be on everyone to decide when the time is right for them to make a move.

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“Ask what your life would look like if you had some support. What would you be able to do if someone else helped with your laundry? How would you feel if you could conveniently meet up with friends? What would having access to restaurants and local activities mean? What’s more important: your address or your quality of life?”

Annie Peace, Health Services Director, Meadowlark

How to Help a Loved One Transition to Long-Term Care

Once your loved ones decide they are ready to move into a long-term care facility, you can help ease their transition.

- **Support:** Even though they may know rationally that it’s time to move, they may struggle emotionally with the loss—loss of independence, loss of home, loss of current lifestyle. Let them express themselves and listen empathetically.

- **Research:** If they are open to it, accompany them on tours of nursing homes. Beyond the nuts and bolts of services and amenities, every facility has a different feel. Help them find a place where they feel most at home.
- **Settling In:** Once they have decided on a place to move, help them work within their new space to create a sense of home. Some facilities provide assistance with small details like rearranging furniture and hanging pictures to help residents settle in.

Making a move to long-term care—and the process of coming to peace with that transition—is a normal part of aging. Keep your ultimate goal in perspective: to have your loved ones enjoy their lives in a safe, supportive, vibrant atmosphere.

